

A High and

CHOWAN COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 9031 00103 2374

ment

Place



Creech

Col.

280

.4

R658h

A History of  
HAPEL BAPTIST CHURCH

Hleton, North Carolina


1848-1998



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2014

A  
High and  
Prominent Place

A History of  
ROBERTS CHAPEL BAPTIST CHURCH  
Pendleton, North Carolina  
1848-1998

 Whitaker Library  
Chowan College  
Murfreesboro, North Carolina

Written for the Church's Sesquicentennial Anniversary  
October 25, 1998  
By Carolyn C. Robinson

Printed by Edmonds Printing Company  
Lawrenceville, Virginia

Office 2  
Shelf 12



*Roberts Chapel Baptist Church,  
(above) celebrates its  
Sesquicentennial anniversary  
October 25, 1998.*

*Dr. Philip E. Thompson (right),  
called by the church in 1995,  
is pastor of Roberts Chapel.*



## The First Hundred Years

### 1848–1948

In his morning prayer at Roberts Chapel Baptist Church on Sunday, May 31, 1998, Deacon John Howard Woodard thanked God for “this beautiful church . . . on this high and most prominent spot.”

“High and prominent spots” have given a sense of place to many Biblical pilgrimages as God’s people have found and lived their faith. For example, the Old Testament tells of God’s having led both Abraham and Moses *to a mountain*—Abraham to test his faith (Genesis 22:1–12); Moses to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19–20). In the New Testament, some of the most important events in Christ’s short ministry on earth were set in high places. Following His baptism, for example, and after the forty days and nights of communing with God in the desert, He encountered the “tempter,” who “set [Jesus] *on the pinnacle* of the temple” and dared Him to throw Himself down to prove that angels would “bear Him up.” Next, Satan took Jesus “*to a very high mountain*” to view all the kingdoms He could possess in exchange for worshiping His tempter. But Jesus said, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’” (Matthew 4:5–10, NRSV). The disciples also knew about high places; often, *from a mountainside*, they heard Jesus

speak of his kingdom and their responsibilities in it, of His impending sacrifice for humankind, a message they often did not understand. The words are still heard by the disciples of the late twentieth century. For example,

When Jesus saw the crowds, *he went up the mountain*; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled . . . ." (Matthew 5:1-3, 6, NRSV)

Matthew's Gospel teaches that after the last supper, Jesus and His disciples went to the *Mount* of Olives before members of the religious establishment seized Him and took Him to Pilate for sentencing. Jesus was crucified the next day at Golgotha, *a knoll* in Jerusalem, whose spiritual height far outdistanced its physical. Matthew also tells that, after the resurrection, "the eleven disciples went to Galilee, *to the mountain* to which Jesus had directed them." There they saw the risen Christ, who said to them,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:16-20. NRSV)

All history is viewed from a "high and prominent" place in the mind's eye. From that vantage point and in observance of their 150th anniversary, the people who are Roberts Chapel Baptist Church reflect on the past as one way to commit their faith and hope to the future.

Because two historical accounts have been published—the first in 1937 and the second in 1948—this volume will focus on the last fifty years in the life of the church but will borrow heavily from the earlier histories. The church clerk in 1937, the late W. Harry Stephenson, wrote *A Brief Historical Sketch of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church* for the occasion of the dedication of “the new church building on August 5, 1937,” and co-authored with his daughter, the late Emma Gay Stephenson, *The History of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church*, which was read by Mildred Davis Bell and Miss Stephenson on October 31, 1948, as the church observed a century of service.

In the search for the origin of Roberts Chapel, located in Pendleton, North Carolina, and a member of the West Chowan Baptist Association of the Baptist State Convention, several theories emerge—particularly as to its name. The Stephenson historians wrote in 1948,

It COULD have been that when the colonies were being settled a large part of this territory was granted to the Englishman, Earl of Granville, and that he gave his subjects Roberts Chapel in which to worship, both masters and slaves; therefore, it was state property. Some say it was named from [sic] a man named Roberts who lived nearby; others say it was named Roberts Chapel by the congregation, after the carpenter who constructed the building and who, it is reported, fell from the roof and died. (9–10)

And to this date, the mystery has not been solved. Philip Thompson, whom the church called as pastor in August 1995, is non-committal: “There are many apocryphal tales as to how the name ‘Roberts’ became attached to the church, and I have no idea which one of those would be the true story. . . .” But he more confidently speculates on the word “Chapel,” saying, “A local church historian has told me that ‘Chapel’ in [the names of] churches in this area is usually associated with Methodism.

So . . . my guess is that 'Roberts Chapel' is a Methodist name and has a Methodist background of some sort" (Interview, July 28, 1998). That the church was once the meeting place of both Methodists and Baptists adds historical character and interest. The earlier histories attest to its duality and, at the same time, at least for a while, its unity.

Mr. Stephenson reported that the first church building was a "Mission Chapel," which was "built sometime prior to 1848, and [was] at that date an old house." As to location and reach, he wrote,

Roberts Chapel Baptist Church was originally located on the county road which leads from Boykins, Virginia, to Woodland, N.C., in Northampton County, North Carolina, . . . about [one fourth] mile south from Woodard's Cross Road, what is now Pendleton, and [two and three-fourths] miles north from Martin's Cross Road, the present town of Conway.

The territory which Roberts Chapel Church originally served (along with Zion and Providence Methodist Church) embraced most of the county which extended from the Meherrin River on the north, from the Hertford County line on the east; to nearly the Potecasi Creek on the south; and mostly to a line extended north from the DeBerry's Mill Pond to the Virginia State line on the west . . . (5)

Evidence persists that "the old house" on the land as described above served in the Colonial Period as a chapel of one of the state-supported Anglican parishes, long since having been abandoned (Lewis, 31-32). In fact, recent information suggests Roberts Chapel's genesis was as an Anglican congregation. Again, Dr. Thompson reasons, "Given the book George Edwards has on Anglican parishes in this area [Henry Wilkins Lewis, *Northampton Parishes*, Jackson, N.C., 1951], it appears that there was a parish known as St. Paul's, and my sense is there is an organic connection of our church to that parish. . . ." He adds,

Of course, the Methodist church began within the Anglican community; [but] after the Revolution, the Anglican church just about fell apart and reconstituted itself as the Protestant Episcopal church. My guess is that, in 1784, when the Methodist church was constituted as a separate denomination, there was a strong contingent of Methodist Anglicans in St. Paul's Parish . . . and they probably took the church as their own.

As for the gap from post-Revolutionary time up to 1848, when [Roberts Chapel] became a Baptist denomination, I only imagine that Baptists and Methodists either met jointly, or they met on alternating weeks, or, perhaps each one had one Sunday a month when they would meet there. I wouldn't even speculate on how it became Baptist, but by 1848, for some reason, it became Baptist. . . .(Interview, July 28, 1998)

The earlier historians alluded to doctrinal disputes between the Baptists and the Methodists, three judges having rendered a decision in favor of the Baptists. "The result was the Methodist[s] claimed 'the judges rendered a bias[ed] decision,' became angry, began gradually to not attend the services and finally gave up the chapel to the Baptist[s], who continued to carry on services" (WHS, 6).

Roberts Chapel Baptist Church was constituted by a Council of Elders on the third Sunday in October 1848. By request of the congregation, Elder James Delk, twice pastor at Meherrin, and, at the time, an itinerant preacher, delivered a sermon based on Acts 2:47:

... Praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (KJV)

Records show that the first church roll comprised thirty charter members:

Martha J. Johnson Allen  
Frances E. Atkinson  
James Atkinson  
Isaac Baugham  
Margaret C. Johnson Baum  
Judith P. Boone  
William Boone  
Henry W. DeLoatch  
Silas Edwards  
John T. Edwards  
Eliza A.R. Garriss  
Charlie Gatling  
Anna Howell  
William K. Howell  
Jeremiah P. Johnson

Lucy B. Johnson  
Louisa Powell Josey  
Martinly L. Vaughan Smith  
Abraham Stephenson  
Louiza Stephenson  
Mary L. J. Stephenson  
Eli Strickland  
Nancy Strickland  
Parmelia Strickland  
Elizabeth H.J. Bottom Sykes  
Jesse L. Vaughan  
John D.L. Vaughan  
Joseph J. Vaughan  
Sarah Vaughan  
Mary M. Vick

On the “high and prominent” day of its establishment, the church received for baptism seven new members, two of whom were African-Americans. After the service, the congregation elected Silas Edwards, John D.L. Vaughan, and William Boone to the first Diaconate, ordaining the latter two, Mr. Edwards having already received ordination in the Potecasi Baptist Church.

In the December conference, the church elected Isaac Baugham, Silas Edwards, and William Boone a committee of three to find a pastor, instructing them “to call Rev. Amos J. Battle of Chowan Female Institute” for services every 3rd Saturday and Sunday. “If he cannot accept, . . . a call is to be extended to Rev. Wm. P. Britton, Jr.” At the February 1849 conference, the committee reported that “the call had been extended to” and cheerfully accepted by Mr. Britton, who “would enter his duties as pastor. . . at that very meeting” (WHS and EGS, 12).

While the duties of a pastor are uniquely defined by the church and its location, general expectations apply to all. The late J. Clyde Turner,

pastor of the First Baptist Church, Greensboro, 1910–48, and president of the Baptist State Convention, 1929–32, wrote in 1951,

The name ‘pastor,’ or ‘shepherd,’ indicates that he was to feed and care for the flock. He was preacher, teacher, leader, and counselor. He was a sympathetic friend and a faithful servant of the church. As such, he was to receive respect and honor from the church (Turner, 57).

The persona and duties of Elder Britton and his successors at Roberts Chapel would seem to fit. But while Baptist ministers are called to one pastorate and later to another, their churches, for the most part, remain where they were “planted”; however, for the sake of organization, this booklet will record the life of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church by dates served by its pastors.

WILLIAM P. BRITTON, JR.

1848–1852

Beginnings seem also to be re-awakenings. The first year in the life of Roberts Chapel and of Mr. Britton’s pastorate was no different. One of the first actions of the church was to join the Chowan Baptist Association, but a real re-awakening came when the church held its first “protracted meeting” in September 1849. The same Elder Battle, whom the members had sought as pastor, “assisted Pastor Britton in the meeting,” and received “\$4.87 1-2” for his efforts. That and future such revivals literally grew the church, records showing that fifteen new members joined during the 1849 services, and the 1850 meeting “resulted in the baptism of 40 willing souls” (WHS, 7). “These meetings were held on the lawn outside the church, as the building was too small, and, as it was not their building, they couldn’t enlarge it” (WHS and EGS, 12).

Mr. Britton’s death in 1853 brought short his ministry. He was succeeded by Elder Battle, who agreed to preach for the remainder of the year

and by interim pastor R.H. Sand, who served the church from June to October 1853.

JOHN N. HOGGARD  
1853–1869

The protracted meeting in September 1854 brought fifty additional members into the church. The revival in 1850 had already reminded the congregation that the building, which was rectangular, “with an arch shaped ceiling, the pulpit stand moderately elevated and in the center of the back end . . .” (WHS, 30), was too small for its membership but could not be enlarged because it was not theirs to enlarge.

In January 1853, a historical event occurred when North Carolina’s Governor David S. Reid granted to Silas Edwards a deed “for one acre of land, including the building, for religious purposes with certain restrictions, at a cost of 5c. . . .” And in May, Edwards, in turn, deeded the property to trustees of Roberts Chapel “for religious purposes at a cost of \$10.00” (Book 35, Deeds and Mortgages, Register of Deed’s office, Jackson, N.C., as cited by W.H. and E.G. Stephenson (12–13). If the property, apparently located then where the cemetery remains, had been part of a tax-supported Anglican parish, it would have indeed been the state’s to sell. It was, unmistakably, used for religious purposes, having served “Roberts Chapel Church from its organization . . . to about 1871, when the second building was erected” (WHS, 30).

The period of Mr. Hoggard’s pastorate was among the most difficult in the history of Northampton County—and of the nation. W.H. Stephenson wrote of the “war stricken and poverty stricken” years, the Civil War having broken out in 1861 and ended in 1865, almost exactly four long years later. Eighteen-sixty-five was also the year in which President Lincoln was assassinated, the Confederacy dissolved; and slavery outlawed by passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. As much as the southern churches of the late years of the Twentieth Century decry the

slavery practices of their ancestors, they also know the implications of cultural change, such as were brought about by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The records of Roberts Chapel reveal that, in 1868, most of the former slaves left the church (WHS, 8).

Despite the ravages of war and all the attendant problems, members of the church were mindful of the benefits of learning—as Baptists usually are—and organized a Sabbath School “on Saturday before the 3rd Lord’s Day in May, 1868” (29).

When Mr. Hoggard’s sixteen-year pastorate ended, he continued at Meherrin. Stephenson wrote of Hoggard, “Only eternity will reveal the amount of good this servant of God did all through this territory” (8).

R.R. SAVAGE  
1870–1886

*The Beards’ Basic History of the United States* suggests that “While Southern people were groping among social and economic ruins for economic security and reorganizing state governments, Northern economy was expanding with unprecedented speed” (292). And while the farmers of Northampton County were concerned, as always, about their crops, industrialists in the North had at their disposal “inventors and searchers [who], besides improving old machines, placed new machines, materials, and processes on which new industries of gigantic proportions were constructed” (293).

But a reader of the Stephensons’ histories senses excitement at the arrival of a new pastor and a move toward the construction of a larger church house. Although the membership had outgrown the old building as early as 1854 and the church had, at the time, made plans for a larger one, it was August 1870—after the Civil War—that a building committee comprising James H. Edwards, K.R. Maddrey, D.N. Stephenson, Benjamin C. Harris, A.H. Stephenson, Oliver Woodard, and Thomas Britt

assumed the responsibilities of getting it done. And despite obstacles associated with costs and labor, the new house of worship was ready in 1871 "at the approximate cost of \$1,000 in money, besides the labor and lumber given. The lumber was all of original heart pine. . . . The dressed lumber was all done by hand. The window blinds, etc., all hand made" (31).

Roberts Chapel "grew in number and influence" under the leadership of its third permanent pastor. "It increased in gifts to the support of our Denominational objects and to the Pastor, as its members gradually grew from under the bad influence of Civil War and the Reconstruction" (9).

Gifts included a piece of land from D.N. Stephenson "to enlarge the church grounds"; funds to help with the building of Jackson Baptist Church; a collection "for the purpose of aiding the missionary work between Chowan and Tar Rivers . . ."; money for "Educational purposes"; contributions to Wake Forest College; and \$34.50 plus fourteen bushels of corn to church members John Atkinson and D.N. Stephenson, whose "crops were mostly destroyed by a severe hail storm" in the summer of 1882. One would wonder if it was the same storm that toppled Mrs. Julian F. Martin's chimney, which M.M. Long was appointed to repair, indicating that gifts of time also pointed to the missionary spirit of the church. "Doing unto others" became a systematic practice; for example, in the September 1884 conference, the members adopted the "Every Member Canvass plan for Benevolent objects" (10-11).

A highlight of Mr. Savage's pastorate occurred in 1884, when the church hosted in its new building the recently formed West Chowan Association, which the Roberts Chapel membership had helped vote into being. In preparation for the meeting and its visiting delegates, the church discussed prohibition of "the sale of any and all articles whatsoever within 1-2 mile. . .," and it particularly deplored the sale of "ardent spirits" (10).

The church obviously entertained graciously:

Roberts Chapel began its leadership in this association, with the prestige of its age [fourth oldest church in the association], its gracious entertainment in the homes of its congregation, and the good sound philosophy of its members. . . .(HWS and EGS, 15)

CHARLES W. SCARBOROUGH  
1886-1908

The benevolent acts of the church continued, both under the interim pastorate of the Rev. A.T. Hood, who supplied for a few services, and under the new minister.

June 1887 W.H. Maddrey church Treas. of Benevolence reported, Beginning at the last association and ending June 1, 1887, that there had been collected for Foreign Missions \$8.40; State Missions, \$4.30; Home Missions, \$5.00; Education \$5.00; Baptist Hospital \$6.00; Mills Home \$6.07. Total \$35.27. (WHS, 11)

In 1903, wrote Stephenson, "church delegates to the union meeting were instructed to pledge \$100.00 for Foreign Missions." Inasmuch as they are included in earlier records, Baptist causes and amounts given are unnecessary to repeat; suffice it to say, the church continued to grow physically and spiritually:

At his [Scarborough's] suggestion the 2 "Infant class rooms" were built on to the church in 1888. Our membership was greatly enlarged by more thorough work in a better Sunday School Building and by more effort in Protracted Meetings. Rev. Billie Savage, Churchland, Virginia, the son of one of our former pastors, held several Protracted Meetings with great numbers uniting with our church. (11)

The church records attest to "more thorough work in a better Sunday School Building." In 1904, Mr. Scarborough led Roberts Chapel to dedicate a weekend to a Sunday school rally. Conducted by H.C. Moore

of Raleigh, the rally's emphasis attracted representatives from Meherrin, Murfreesboro, Hebron, Sandy Run, Rich Square, Creekville, Mt. Carmel, Severn, and Galatia churches. And, in 1906, the church added \$15.00 to the budget for Sunday school literature. "Heretofore," wrote Harry Stephenson, "literature of Sunday School had been paid for out of Sunday School collection. Since that date our church has been paying expenses and supervising the Sunday School and all other organizations of the church" (29).

At Roberts Chapel, as in most churches, the physical plant was—and is—a rallying point. In 1903, members wanted an organ, although, wrote Stephenson, "For a long time some of our members thought it sacrilegious to have any musical instrument in church" (11). The new organ—"that you pumped with your feet," according to Mr. Connie Taylor in 1997—was installed at a cost of \$80.00. The committee charged with soliciting funds collected \$101.85—\$21.85 more than was necessary, with Miss Reola Lee raising \$84.50 of the total. But, put to good use, the excess "was invested in a carpet" (11). Once the organ and the carpet were in place, a different committee—except for Reola Lee, the only repeating solicitor—sought funds for a clock and a table, with Miss Lee again out-cannvassing her colleagues with \$17.27 of the \$22.58 collected.

It bears repeating that the church continually spent time and money for people and things other than for those that enhanced its own building: for "Bro. W.E. Vann whose household and kitchen furniture was burned"; for "Mr. Joe Morgan who was suffering with a cancer on his face"; for "Bro. J. C. Taylor to purchase a horse, his having died during crop season" (WHS, 12–13).

For the first time, the histories mentioned holding baptism at the mill pond following a week's protracted meeting in 1908. "A large number of candidates were baptized" (12). In fact, wrote Mr. Stephenson, "It was during Bro. Scarborough's pastorate that our membership was the largest. From our church many members took Letters of Dismission to

help organize Severn in 1896, Conway in 1905, and Ashley Grove in 1909." In addition, "Bro. Scarborough preached the dedication sermon of Woodland Baptist Church on First Sunday in August 1904, which church he helped to organize" (12).

Of this pastor, W.H. Stephenson wrote, "[His] was a long and blessed pastorate of 22 years. He loved his people and everyone loved him. He was a plain Gospel preacher who loved the Lord's work" (10). Mr. Scarborough died in 1922.

J.H. POTEAT  
1909-1912

Roberts Chapel started 1909 with a new pastor. J.H. Poteat served half-time both there and at Buckhorn. "He was a good preacher, and strong for the Baptist Denomination," facts which may have accounted for, in part, the "spiritual revival of our membership" (WHS, 12-13).

Spiritual and material matters continued their apparently healthy balance. It is interesting to note that the congregation's voting in May 1909 for the installation of gas lights was for the possibility of "more preaching on Sunday nights" (12). And the church, in a philanthropic yet practical act, funded two scholarships each year at Chowan College from about 1910-14. In 1911, "a collection was taken to assist Ashley Grove members to build their church building" (13).

And a historic event occurred in 1909, when Roberts Chapel granted a letter to Junius Martin, its only remaining black member, to unite with another church "of the same Faith and order" (13).

L.E. DAILEY  
1912-1917

Mr. Dailey followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, serving both Roberts Chapel and Buckhorn churches until about 1915, when he resigned at Buckhorn and later "took on Mt. Carmel and Kelford Baptist Churches with Roberts Chapel as a field for about 1 year" (13).

Emphases similar to those of previous pastorates seemed to continue: spiritual matters; benevolence; educational projects within—and sometimes outside—the church; and the physical plant.

As to spiritual matters, the historians faithfully recorded the dates of and responses to protracted meetings. For the first time, the name “revival” replaced that of “protracted meeting” in the account of the services in 1916: “Rev. T.C. Keaton, pastor of Murfreesboro church, assisted Bro. Dailey in our Revival services beginning First Sunday in September 1916, which continued one week with much results” (14).

Benevolences included the usual missions offerings and collections for Baptist causes, and, of course, the gifts of time.

And the pursuit of educational programs took on new vigor. “In conference August 5, 1916,” wrote Mr. Stephenson, were “the first records we have of a B.Y.P.U. for Roberts Chapel Church. It was held in connection with a Teacher-Training course at Sunday night services by Bro. Dailey” (14).

In 1916, two years after an appointed committee furnished the church with a communion set and after the length of time it took to dig “a good well of water” (13), “the question of a new church building to be built on the old site, or at Pendleton, was introduced at the conference of January 1, 1916. The question was deferred to May 6, 1916 conference when it was tabled” (14).

A historian would wonder how much the threat of World War I had played in the church’s having deferred the question of a new church house. Germany’s having sunk the *Lusitania* in 1915 and, in 1917, having resumed “unrestricted submarine warfare,” must have been unsettling indeed. In February 1917, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Germany; in April, Congress declared war; and, in May, Mr. Dailey resigned as pastor of Roberts Chapel. The Rev. Kelley White supplied during the summer months of June–September.

F.B. RAYMOND

1918–1920

The Armistice was signed November 11, 1918. Meanwhile, back in Pendleton, Roberts Chapel members saw the need to establish a cemetery on the church property, and, by 1919, the congregation had wasted no time in appointing a committee to maintain it.

A further report on the property indicates that the church house was repainted (for \$27.50) in July 1919, even though discussions of a new church persisted. Perhaps the congregation wished to “dress up” the building for the Sunday School Convention of the Bertie Union Meeting to be held there in September.

Although the aftermath of World War I invaded the culture, few details of its effect on Roberts Chapel are included in the church records. However, a note in the *New York Times Almanac* might have interested the farmers of Northampton County in 1920: It reports that, for the first time, the “U.S. population [was] more urban than rural” (73).

At any rate, “Bro. Raymond was a minister well versed in the Bible and a good pastor” (WHS, 14). He would die seventeen years later on July 9, 1937.

E. NORFLEET GARDNER

1920–1924

Hearing stories from some current members, a listener would infer that Mr. Gardner was one of the most revered pastors in the history of the church. Ruth Stephenson Phillips’ face lights up when she tells of his ventriloquism that led her and her frolicking playmates to believe there were bid-dies under her front porch (Conversation with the Phillipses, July 28, 1998).

The late Hinton Britton said, "The first time I really remember enjoying going to church was when Norfleet Gardner came down in 1920. Maybe it was because I was a young boy, and he took such an interest in the young people." Mr. Britton remembered being eleven years old when he was baptized in the mill pond by his "favorite pastor"—the boys changing clothes in the mill and the girls in the miller's house (Interview with Philip Thompson, September 23, 1996). According to the Stephenson historians,

The young people of our church became very active in all phases of church work and were fortunate to enjoy the teachings and companionship of such Gardner friends and leaders as Dr. Kyle M. Yates, the talented Carver family [Mrs. Gardner was the daughter of W.O. Carver, for whom the Carver School of Missions, once part of the Southern Baptist Seminary, was named], and Dr. and Mrs. Geo. W. Sadler, then missionaries to Africa. (17)

Although every Sunday is a "homecoming" of sorts, the first official Homecoming Day for Roberts Chapel was held August 5, 1921; the event was such a success that, on reflection, historian W.H. Stephenson said, "[I]t looked as if every ex-member was present and enjoyed the occasion. The crowd was estimated at 1500 people" (15).

The previous "biographies" of Roberts Chapel imply two major church emphases during Mr. Gardner's pastorate: music and a new church. First came hymnals in 1922, but in earlier years,

The pastor or leader would read off the words of a verse or two and then the congregation would join in. They did this until they learned the words of the song. Song books were very scarce and without notes. After some years song books such as could be used at preaching services were available. Then came the Glad Refrain and the Gospel Hymnal—Songs suitable for all church services. (20)

To replace the organ and “to improve our music,” a new Howard piano accompanied the singing (WHS, 16). But there was little music in the collective heart of Roberts Chapel on the day of Mr. Gardner’s last sermon—December 14, 1924—after a spark from the flue above the children’s classroom ignited dry leaves blown under the eaves by fall winds. The blaze ignited the church bell’s rope, which came falling from the ceiling, still on fire. Mr. Connie Taylor was there: In a conversation with Dr. Thompson, Mr. Taylor remembered that Mrs. Gardner, teacher of the children, “stamped the fire out with her foot, got the children out, and notified the others that the church was on fire” (8–12–97). Ruth Stephenson Phillips was also there and remembers how calm her teacher, Mrs. Gardner, remained through it all. Audrey Barnes Harper, who was about five, she thinks, and her brothers were playing in their yard. On seeing the smoke, they climbed their father’s tall gate and watched the building burn (Conversation with Mrs. Harper, 7–9–98). A bucket brigade carrying water from the well across the road couldn’t save the church, but Mr. Taylor persists in his belief that it could have been spared had a fire department existed at the time.

The fire was a defining—perhaps a *refining*—moment in the life of Roberts Chapel. While the idea of a new church building had emerged as early as 1916, “there was much discussion pro and con from time to time but no action was taken until after the church fire. . .” (WHS, 31).

December 14, 1924—a sad day in more ways than a church goer can imagine—was a time to let go of the building in which the congregation had worshiped for more than a half century and a time to say goodbye to their pastor, who had accepted a call to Thomasville Baptist Church.

Even with no consistent pastoral leadership from December 31, 1924–July 1, 1925, the church moved toward settling on an interim site while constructing a new building under the seriously responsible lay leaders who, even as late as 1998, remain legendary:

Our congregation quickly decided to rebuild at Pendleton, and bargained for and purchased the Starkey Woodard property for the church site. In January 3, 1925 conference, Bro. Will Stephenson, 'treasurer of the land fund,' reported \$1,825.00 had been paid to Bro. D.M. Woodard for the Woodard property. . . . This money was contributed by one member. . . . As per instruction, the Board of Deacons sold the houses, etc., for \$252.90, which gave the financial beginning of the new building. Our "Ways and Means Committee" recommended in conference January 31, 1925, that we build a \$15,000 house of solid brick and that our membership be apportioned by families. . . . (31–32)

In the meantime, the church gathered for worship in the Pendleton school and was still meeting there when the next pastor came to the field.

### J. LEWIS PRICE 1925–1930

Mr. Price had begun his ministry at Roberts Chapel July 1, 1925, and on April 6, 1926, a groundbreaking ceremony signaled the first move toward laying the foundation of the new church. Deacon D.N. Stephenson turned "the first shovel of dirt, after prayer had been made by Rev. R.D. Stephenson" (32).

W.H. Stephenson wrote, "Bro. Price's pastorate . . . was during the building and collecting period of our new church house. He saw that the proper committees were appointed, encouraged them in their duties and put the collecting and building operations through with the least friction possible" (18). "Surely," wrote Stephenson, "the Lord sent him to Roberts Chapel at such a time" (18), a statement reminiscent of Mordecai's words

to Esther: "... and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14, KJV).

June 1926 seemed to be a month of particular economic hardship: "No funds will be on hand after all bills have been paid," reported the finance committee.

It was then voted that after the members [sic] notes have been paid so far as could be collected, that all remaining notes be used by Finance Committee as collateral. This committee was authorized ... to borrow money to the extent of the notes that the work might continue on the new building.

In a call [sic] conference on June 13, 1926, after Sunday School, the Finance Committee reported they were unable to borrow money for the New Building on the strength of the uncollected notes of the members to be used as collateral.

On recommendation of the bank, our church voted to borrow money on a Joint Note of its members which was supported by a Deed of Trust on the church grounds and new building. ... The amount to be borrowed not to exceed \$5000. (WHS, 19)

But before the finance committee borrowed the \$5,000, it had to ask the church to "endorse a note for \$600 to secure the Bank of Severn, and pay wages until conference. . . ." (19). The financial struggle continued long after the church house had been completed "in about one year" from the groundbreaking, "at a total cost of \$18,000, with a heavy debt on it"; however, it would not be dedicated until "the last dollar was paid . . ." (32). In the meantime, the church took stringent measures:

Whereas, the scriptures teach that it is the duty of every Christian to help propagate the Gospel; and whereas, our church covenant specifically states, and those united with the church agree, to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry and the expenses of the church. Therefore—Be it resolved—that any

member who refuses to support the causes mentioned in this resolution, except in case of inability to pay, for a period of 12 months, shall be notified by the treasurer, and, if the member so notified does not respond by the payment of obligations within one month from the date of notice, this member shall be notified the second time, and, if there be no response at the end of the 2nd month, this member shall be automatically excluded from the church without further action on the part of the church. (21)

*The Beards' Basic History of the United States* offers a telling account of this period. *Except for farmers*, it reads, "the country seemed safe and sound on the 'high plateau of permanent prosperity.'" The conditions reported by the Beards immediately preceded the Great Depression of 1929, when the "business boom . . . burst with a resounding crash" (452).

Economic woes notwithstanding, Roberts Chapel held its first services in the new church house on Sunday, May 29, 1927, Mr. Price basing his sermon on Joshua 4:6: "That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?" (KJV).

Not a good time for heavy debt, the church nevertheless continued its benevolent acts: \$25.00 and "several barrels of corn [for] Bro. W.C. Stephenson who had his barn and corn destroyed by lightning" and \$78.93 to help "defray Sister Price's hospital expenses" (WHS, 21-22).

In this period, Roberts Chapel suffered hardships other than financial ones: one was the resignation of its pastor on September 14, 1930, effective "About October 15." Mr. Price and his family were to move "from this field to Bethel Baptist church, Bloxom, Va." As sad as the congregation apparently was to see him go—"many words of regret were spoken"—they rallied around to raise the salary due him:

Church treasurer, J.N. Horne reported he had secured from collection during September, \$274.88 and after paying several bills he then had \$160.00 to help defray the \$495.00 then due to Bro. Price. The

Deacon[s] paid him in full. . . Bro. Price gave \$58.15 toward paying the debt on our new building when he left. (22)

Although Roberts Chapel was without a pastor from October 1930 to May 1931, when R.H. Herring came to serve in the interim, the church moved forward—as Baptist churches often do—in the spirit of democracy and in the priesthood of all believers.

A.W.H. JONES  
1932–1936

Mr. Herring remained through the rest of 1931. On January 1, 1932, the Rev. Jones began his four-year pastorate. At the time, “Roberts Chapel and Buckhorne parted the Church Field,” which had continued for approximately sixty-two years, “with the exception of about 1 year while Bro. Dailey was pastor” (23). When Mr. Jones accepted the church’s call, he served Severn and Margarettsville churches. Stephenson’s *Brief Historical Sketch* reads, “This was a period of depression when finances were low in both secular and religious work.” But payments on the church debt continued because contributions continued. On Christmas 1932, for example, “we collected by individual gifts \$628.10” (24).

The March 1933, conference report alludes to the concrete walk’s completion, with funds “contributed by members and W.P.A.” And, at the last conference of the year, N.B. Boone’s annual report showed that, from money collected through Sunday school, he had paid “to building fund, \$96.75; Chowan College, \$48.54; Missions, \$41.88; Orphanage, \$42.82; Hospital, \$6.11; W.M. Union, \$5.40; Total \$241.50” (24).

If the church suffered financially, it was, nevertheless, richly served by the revivals of 1933 and 1934, from which came 21 baptisms, one transfer of letter, and one restoration.

CHAUNCY M. PEGRAM

1936–1938

In the next four months, “Rev. R.D. Stephenson came to two conferences, preached and acted as moderator” (24). After no permanent pastor had been present to “shepherd” the Roberts Chapel “flock” for that length of time, the church must have gladly welcomed into “full fellowship” on June 9, 1936, the Rev. and Mrs. C.M. Pegram and their children John Jacob, Daphne, and Chan.

On May 29, 1927, ten long years before Mr. Pegram’s arrival, the congregation had worshiped for the first time in its new church house. And a year before that, on June 27, 1926, it had pledged not to dedicate the building “until the last dollar was paid.” Dedication Day was the very occasion for which the church had published Mr. Stephenson’s history. He wrote, “Bro. Pegram’s pastorate here has been pleasant and progressive; our church membership has been enlivened by excluding non-acting and receiving new members, and our church debt which amount[ed] to some over \$3,000 at his coming has been paid” (25).

So the time for dedication had finally come. After some difficulty in finding a Sunday on which the former pastors could participate, the church decided to celebrate on Thursday, August 5, 1937, in the middle of the annual protracted meeting, which was to begin on August 1 “and continue through the week—afternoons and nights.” The vote on July 3 had stipulated “an all day service” (Min., 7–3–37). The records fully cover the event. Former pastors L.E. Dailey, E.N. Gardner, J.L. Price, and A.W.H. Jones, with the then-current minister, C.M. Pegram, participated in the morning worship service. The Rev. A.D. Stephenson of Franklin, Virginia, preached the dedicatory sermon. Following dinner and intermission, a song service and the “burning of the three notes which had been paid” introduced the afternoon program. “Talks by E.N. Gardner, J.L. Price, Rev. R.D. Stephenson and others spoke in regards to the past history of Roberts

Chapel Church. A History of the Church in the shape of a handbook was distributed at 50¢ each."

The protracted meeting, which had begun the previous Sunday, "resulted in the baptism of 10 candidates after Profession of Faith in Christ" (Mins.). The church was grateful to the pastor. "Mr. Pegram," wrote W.H. Stephenson, "is doing a great work for our young people through the Sunday School and B.Y.P.U." (25). Edith Stephenson Simpson of Raleigh, one of the young people at the time, particularly remembers Mr. Pegram's children as her playmates. She laughingly recalls his "taking a carload of us to Boykins [Va.] every Saturday night to see a western movie"—this despite the fact that "everybody's shoes had to be polished for Sunday school the next day." Mrs. Simpson's "everybody" included her siblings—Martha Lou, Wiley, Jr., and Earl Stephenson (Conversation, 8–21–98).

Conference minutes of October 1, 1938, read, "Bro. C.M. Pegram tendered his resignation as Pastor of Roberts Chapel Church to take effect Nov. 1st, 1938." The church accepted his resignation October 9, and a pulpit committee was appointed immediately. Mr. Pegram went to Calvary Baptist Church in Raleigh.

LONNIE SASSER  
1939–1941

Roberts Chapel was without a pastor for only two months. Records show that "Regular conference met on Feby. 4, 1939 with Rev. Lonnie Sasser, our new pastor, as moderator." But in the interim, the church took action on a cultural matter:

By vote . . . Jan. 28, 1939, the following petition was instructed to be mailed to the Hon. Wayland Spruill and the Hon. Hinton L. Joyner, Members of the General assembly, Raleigh, N.C.

"We, the Members of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church, Pendleton, N.C. . . . , in conference assembled this 29th day of Jan. 1939 do hereby ask that you vote for a law to prohibit the sale of wine, beer, or any spirituous beverages on Sundays in Northampton Co.

"We further ask you to vote for a law that all Filling-Stations, Rook Houses and similar places of business in Northampton Co. be closed on Sundays from 10 o'clock a.m. to 12:30 p.m."

Other matters of business included the clerk's being instructed to "rent the church farm land for this year" (Min., 3-4-39). But the serious decisions having to do with the operations of the church and results of its service dominated the records. In July 1939, "It was voted that 1/2 of benevolent funds be sent to Chowan College from date"; and, on September 3, 1939, "Clarence Bailey Jones was licensed to preach the Gospel by Roberts Chapel Church." The Rev. Jones would also be ordained by the church on September 9, 1940, after an Ordination Council examined him and recommended the ordination.

And the protracted meeting of September 4-8 was newsworthy:

Our pastor, Lonnie Sasser, conducted the meeting. Our church was revived and there were ten additions. On Sunday afternoon September 23, 1939, the following were baptized in our church baptism—who, previously on September 8th upon a profession of faith in Jesus Christ had been received into our membership: Marvin Johnson, Trilby Johnson, Edith Stephenson, Martha Lou Stephenson, Joe Alex Horne, Charlie Jones, Royster Futrell, George Parker Edwards, and Foye [sic] Barnes.

Our baptism was held in an united baptism with Ashley Grove and Lasker Baptist Church. Bro. Sasser, pastor of all these churches, baptized about 20 in our baptism that afternoon.

The records show that a similar service was held in 1940, when Mr. Sasser again held a joint baptismal service at Roberts Chapel. But,

apparently, the 1939 service christened the baptistry. (Records show that the baptisms of those professing faith in 1938 took place in the mill pond.) Following that historical service, the church got busy and completed the baptistry "at a cost of \$43.15" (Min., 9-30-39).

The next "high and prominent" service was a Thanksgiving observance on November 30, 1939. "The collection amounted to \$19.86—in addition to \$25.09 worth of peanuts given by some of the members for the Orphanage."

Up to and including this time, only the men attended church conferences. But, in 1940, the church voted to have the treasurer make his report at the preaching service on the first Sunday morning of the month, "that the lady members might know the church's financial condition." This instruction followed the ruling that "All lady members who are in arrears in paying church salaries were excused for all indebtedness up to 1939 apportionment" (Min., 2-3-40).

Another matter of business came before the church on Sunday morning, July 13, 1941, when Mr. Sasser offered his resignation, effective two days later. In the August conference, a letter was granted for the Sassers "to unite with some other Baptist church." Though pastorless, the church, nevertheless, held services: "On the third Sunday, September 21, 1941, at the regular hour of preaching, 'our Rules of Decorum, Church Covenant, and Religious beliefs were read, . . . we having no minister present.'"

### CURTIS P. CLEVELAND

1942-1944

It was wartime again. While Europe had been engulfed in the fighting for some time, the United States had not entered World War II until after Japan's December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. Having begun

his pastorate January 1, 1942, and ended it as of February 1, 1944, the Rev. Curtis P. Cleveland served Roberts Chapel for almost the length of the war.

A grim reminder of war entered the conference minutes for April 4, 1942: "A prayer was offered for the consolation of Bro. Wiley Sumner's family in the death of their son who was killed during active service in the U.S. Merchant Marine." And in the July 5, 1942 minutes, another reminder appears: "A bill of \$8.82 for Pocket Bibles to be given our Soldier Boys was ordered paid." Otherwise, few references are made as to how the war directly affected the church; however, memories linger in the minds of those who served and in the hearts of their families. Photographs of World War II service men from Roberts Chapel were on display for the Sesquicentennial, October 25, 1998.

Probably little "fighting" accompanied the church vote on May 3, 1944 to do away with Saturday conferences, and, on June 7, 1942, the deacons recommended "that our quarterly conference be held on First Sundays in January, April, July and October after the preaching hour of Sunday mornings." The vote in favor was unanimous. In the same meeting, the church voted to omit the conference roll calls.

At about this time, the minutes began carrying summaries of the annual associational letter. In 1943,

The letter showed we have 230 members – pay our pastor an annual salary of \$950.00 – that we contributed to Local Expenses of church \$1607.29 – and to Gifts of all Missions, Education, Orphanages, etc., \$766.06 – Total \$2373.35 – an average gift of \$10.31 per member.

While associational letters always tell a story, they are never as comprehensive as conference minutes. On November 14, 1943, "It was voted that Roberts Chapel Church (ought to) join in with Severn Baptist Church to 'form a field' while the opportunity was open, Severn being without a pastor and our present union with Newsome, Va., church was inconvenient." Then,

At preaching hour Sunday, Nov. 21, 1943, Bro. Cleveland advised us he thought our "church fields" ought to be more compact in order for Pastors to visit and work more with their members, and in order for us to feel free to form a New Field, he offered his resignation as pastor—to take effect Feby. 1st 1944. . . .

Our pastor made some remarks of appreciation of our help and hospitality. . . advising us that he would be with us no longer after Jan. 31, 1944. He becomes Pastor of Madison Street Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Va. on Feby. 1, 1944.

### FLETCHER FORD

1944-1949

The church put in place its plan for the new field: "Rev. Fletcher Ford of Emporia, Va. became our pastor with Severn Baptist Church as the other half of the Field on March 1st, 1944." Inasmuch as Mr. Ford would live in the parsonage at Severn, Roberts Chapel voted to "help pay for the improvement of the Parsonage . . . as much as \$500.00" (Min., 3-19-44). Not many years later, Roberts Chapel began a conversation about a parsonage of its own.

The church's sense of ownership extended beyond its own property. Throughout the years, records made reference to ties with Chowan College in Murfreesboro, less than ten miles away. In March 1947, the church apparently felt some anxiety as to Chowan's future as it appointed delegates to represent the congregation "at Edenton, N.C. in regards to Chowan College." Messrs. Jim Edwards, J.C. Edwards, Wiley Stephenson, and W.H. Stephenson were instructed to vote "not to give away Chowan College and its endowment to the State Baptist Convention" (Min., 3-28-47). In a called conference on May 4, "It was voted we collect and pay over to Chowan College the amount of (\$500.00) Five hundred dollars per year for a period of five years, beginning October 1, 1947." The clerk recorded J.C. Edwards' retort: "If Chowan College opens." The earlier vote was rescinded, however, when "Our State Education Secretary promised to give

to Chowan. . . from our State [Cooperative Program] Funds,” and the church returned to the private subscription method of contributions to its neighboring college.

As alluded to in earlier references, the annual protracted meeting was of the utmost importance. An interesting note about the August 1948 revival evokes images of cardboard fans in motion: “We had a good meeting though mighty warm weather.” Also in 1948, another special service occupied minds and dictated deeds for weeks: Roberts Chapel was about to observe its Centennial, on the fifth Sunday in October. In anticipation of the event, the church voted unanimously to “paint and improve the looks of our church building.” At the same conference, the congregation granted their pastor a bonus of \$200.00 (Min., 7–26–48).

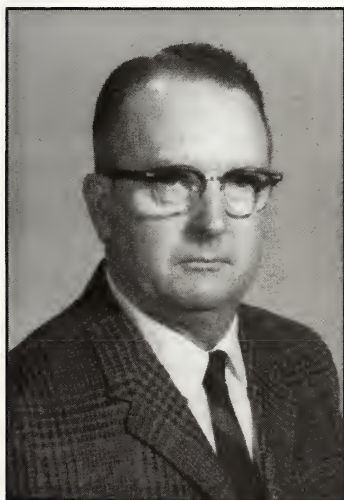
The menu for dinner-on-the-grounds included barbecue and all the trimmings, members generously contributing pigs, chickens, and money. Also, in generous spirit, Conway church sent \$100.00 to help defray the costs. “Our crowd was estimated at 650 or more. . . . Our celebration of Roberts Chapel Baptist’s 100th Birth-day was acclaimed an enjoyable and profitable occasion” (Undated report).

Following the Centennial celebration, the Rev. Ford stayed only about two months longer. But with Pendleton and Severn churches, he had celebrated the end of World War II, in 1945. The war had invaded his pastorate at the very first when “Bro. James Bristow was killed in the collision of three airplanes at Greenville, S.C., February 12, 1944, while in the pursuit of his regular army duties” (Min., 2–20–44).

After those eventful years, Mr. Ford resigned to become pastor of Four Oaks Baptist Church, in January 1949.



*Early days at the new brick church, circa 1928*

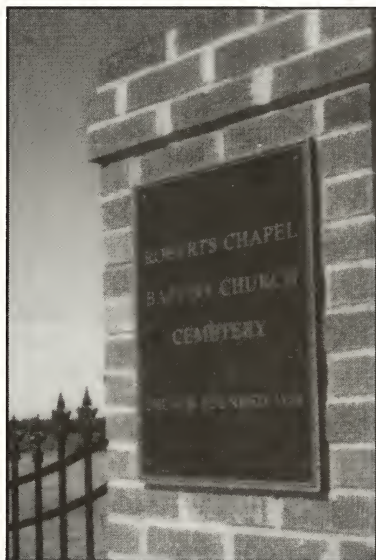


*The Rev. Randolph Phillips  
Pastor 1953-1967*



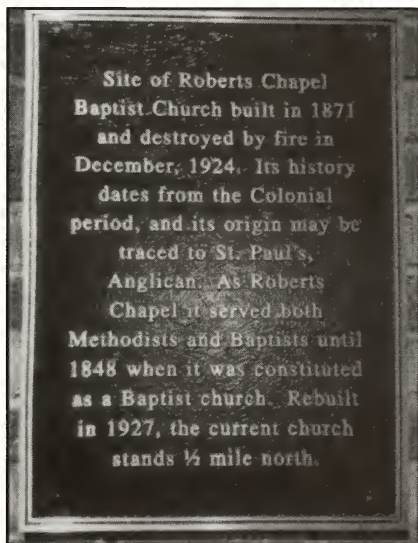
*Mr. Phillips (left) first full-time pastor  
of Roberts Chapel and first resident of  
the parsonage (above), still retains his  
membership in the church in 1998.*





*Cemetery improvements in 1998 include new driveways and a gate. A plaque on one brick pillar names the church; the opposite plaque gives a brief history of Roberts Chapel. The addition to the church of a fellowship hall and classrooms (above) dates back to 1959.*

*Opposite page: (upper left) the sanctuary in 1998; (upper right) the steeple, a gift of the G.E. Fisher family in 1979; (lower left) the sanctuary in 1948.*





*Focus on the children, 1983*



*Vacation Bible School, 1993*



*The first GA Coronation, 1958*



## Into the Second Century 1948–1998

In his prayer at Roberts Chapel Baptist Church on Sunday, May 31, 1998, Deacon John Howard Woodard not only expressed his thankfulness for “this beautiful church . . . on this high and most prominent spot,” but he also thanked God for “the opportunities this church has had in the last 150 years to serve Thee and attempt to carry out Thy will. We pray Thy further blessings upon us that this congregation will be in place here for many years to come, and we pray that we will never fail Thee in our service.” It was a noble prayer. It is a noble church.

J.C. RAY  
1949–1953

Roberts Chapel and Severn churches cooperated in the calling of J.C. Ray from Monroe, N.C., “as pastor of this Church Field” (Min., 5–1–49). He preached for the first time in Pendleton on July 17, 1949. Mr. Ray, like many of his predecessors, observed the church in its ongoing support of the Baptist college in Murfreesboro. In fact, in the budget scheduled for preparation in the fall of 1950, the finance committee included a sum “amounting to \$1.00 per resident member for Chowan College Endowment” (Min., 4–2–50).

Former President of Meredith College, the late Carlyle Campbell, once said, "Civilization began when someone said 'let's' [and] 'I' became 'we'" (Carlyle Campbell, address, unknown date, Meredith College). In the history of communities and their Baptist churches, "we" becomes the pronoun of choice. Almost all of Roberts Chapel's action were as a community. For example, on November 4, 1951, the church accepted a recommendation from the organ committee—Ray W. Stephenson; M.B. Johnson; E.J. Burgess; Viola Stephenson; and Iris Flythe— first, to buy an electric organ and, second, "that we purchase a Baldwin at the price of \$2,845.00." The vote was 30–4 in favor. Further,

On Second Sunday in Feb. 1952 it was announced by the organ committee that the organ money had been collected. It was decided on 1st Sun. in Feb. 1952 that if all the organ money would be collected before 3rd Sun. in Feb. That [sic] we would have an Organ Recital on third Sun. Afternoon in celebration of that event. . . .

The "Recital and Song Service" was . . . held on third Sun. p.m. conducted by Miss Dorothy Ballinger of Chowan College and Rev. Lonnie Sasser. . . . We had a large gathering and an enjoyable service. (Min., 39)

Soon to follow the new organ were three new deacons. Out of the conference of July 6, 1952 came a resolution to that effect:

BE IT RESOLVED: That the terms of the present nine members of the Board of Deacons remain indefinite, as . . . at the present time;

That at the regular October 1952 conference the church elect three additional deacons to take office as of January 1, 1953, the term of each of whom shall be three years and each of whom shall be ineligible for re-election for a period of 12 months from the date of expiration of his term;

That hereafter any additional or successor deacon shall be elected for a term of three years beginning the following January first and be ineligible for re-election for a period of 12 months from the date of expiration of his term or of his death or resignation.

But in the meantime, the church lot committee recommended that the vacant land on Highway 35 “be surveyed and divided into three lots”; that “the lot next to the church, 75 feet front extending back to the back line, be offered to Mr. and Mrs. Raleigh Davis for \$600.00 for a residence for themselves”; . . . and that “all the money realized from the sale of these lots be deposited in a savings account subject to withdrawal only by order of the church” (Min., 1–6–52).

Next came the question of a parsonage and—more—the question of a full-time pastor:

On April 19, 1953, “It was voted that we go on record that we favor and intend to build a parsonage for our church. It was also voted that we favor a full-time pastorate . . . at some future date.”

The church moved ahead in July by appointing Mrs. G.T. Stephenson, Mrs. J.M. Edwards, W.M. Stephenson, Benjamin Mann, and R.W. Stephenson to the parsonage committee (Min., 7–5–53). On the very same Sunday in July, J.C. Ray, “who has been with us for a period of 4 years and some over in a Church Field with Severn offered his resignation to take effect on September 30, 1953” to become Severn’s full-time pastor. “Our church voted unanimously a vote of appreciation and thanks to Bro. Ray for his untiring efforts and help in our church work. . . .”

### RANDOLPH PHILLIPS

1953–1967

With only three months left in 1953, the church elected the Rev. Randolph Phillips to supply for “all Sundays until 1954,” determining “that during the period of his supply pastorate, the members of the church

have responsibility for his lodging and meals, entertaining him according to their respective preferences, either in their homes or at the Holoman House, Murfreesboro" (Min., 11-8-53). But when the end of the year approached, the congregation was not ready to see him go. By unanimous vote on December 27, 1953, the church called him as their first full-time pastor. At the time, he was a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the seminary was in its second year of operation. The new pastor was committed to rural ministry.

In this historically significant time, the church made some worship-enhancing, as well as some cosmetic, changes. As for the latter,

Our church gave Mrs. Margaret Stephenson a vote of thanks for the 10 "Boxwood" green shrubbery which she had set out in front of our church building in honor of her Grand Mother, Grand Father, uncles, aunts, Father, etc. for the D.N. Stephenson family. The shrubbery was transplanted from the D.N. Stephenson plantation. (Min., 1-3-54)

And as for encouraging participation in worship, Roberts Chapel bought 200 new *Broadman Hymnals*. So continued the life of a church in a building mode—building physically, building spiritually, and building reasonably.

Members of Roberts Chapel would not allow themselves to stray too far into the satisfaction of "worldly goods." For example, in the April 8, 1956, conference, "Our church clerk called our attention to the [financial] report that it was mostly used to pay for local expenses and that our benevolence was lacking." (The only "benevolent" contribution in the first quarter of 1956 was \$15.05 for Homes for the Aging, out of \$1,710.88 total expenditures.) Third quarter offerings were quite different, however—some going to the Baptist Hospital (Mother's Day offering); Homes for the Aging; missions (from the Bible school collection); Children's Homes (Thanksgiving offering); State Missions; and the Cooperative Program. Although not offered here in detail, the second quarter's report can be judged by treasurer Robert Edward's comments: "Considering the financial conditions of farmers during

this quarter, this report is very good. We wish to express our gratitude to each of you for your part in making it so" (Treasurer's reports).

A bit of controversy arose in the October 6, 1957, conference, at which the deacons were asked to discuss "the advisability of adding Deaconess[es] to our Roberts Chapel Board. . . ." The report came back at the conference of December 1, 1957: "We advise, do not elect Deaconess[es] at present at least. By vote of the church . . . the report was accepted and by big majority it was decided we do not elect Lady Deacons." While the idea of women deacons would not be controversial in years to come, the fact that the question was considered as early as 1957 would indicate Roberts Chapel's more progressive stance than that of many Southern Baptist churches—rural, urban, large, or small.

In 1998, Mr. Phillips remembers another controversial subject of those days—farmers working in the fields on Sundays:

When I came here some few men were already being sentenced to hell in the minds of some people because they worked at harvesting on Sunday. My question was, "What are the ethical values?" If they were concerned about saving the peanuts, and if they shared the income [from the work] with the church, then it was God's work. I was more interested in what they thought about on seven days a week than on just one day. These people are reasonable in their attitudes toward the church and the activities of the people—as long as they're legal and right. (Conversation with the Phillipses, 7–28–98)

A full-time pastor receives a full-time salary. Such was the belief of the budget planners for 1954–55, when they raised the pastor's salary from \$1,800 to \$3250.00. The church staff included a sexton and a financial secretary.

The parsonage was paid for by 1958. J.M. Edwards reported for the parsonage committee that the total . . . cost was \$16,198.00. "He also reported \$1691.00 in the Bank of Conway, being held in our Building Fund" (Min., 1-5-58). A year earlier, a garage for the pastor had also been completed and paid for. And, in a special conference on December 7, 1958, the church voted to enter a building program: "We, the members of the Planning Committee . . . , after thorough study and consideration, believe the present educational facilities . . . to be inadequate for our present and future needs." The unanimous vote seemed to spark new interest in the educational program of the church. For example, the deacons suggested a monthly teachers' meeting; the church decided to buy a piano for the new Sunday school department; in 1962, Miss Jessie Draper reported 337 books in the church library; and the associational letter for 1963-64 reported a membership of 66 in Sunbeams, G.A.'s, Y.W.A.'s and the W.M.S., while the average attendance in Sunday school was 109 and, in Training Union, 55.

No sooner had the church heard on January 10, 1965, Ben Mann's report that "all notes and debts on the church building additions have been paid in full" than it voted "to enter into a 'Face-Lifting' or 'Beautification' program. . . ." On page 276 of the conference minutes book, one reads, "After services on Sunday night, September 13, 1965, the 'Planning Committee' for the Sanctuary of Roberts Chapel Church" made its report—complete with sketches by architect William Boone of Charlotte—and brought its recommendations: "renovations of chairs and pulpit"; "acoustical tile ceiling with indirect lighting"; "new pews and carpet"; "entire interior painted"; "new heating system"—for an estimated cost of \$17,000. The church approved the plan on September 19, 1965, at a cost "not to exceed \$20,000." On October 10, 1966, "Miss Iris Liverman, chairman of the Planning and Building Committee, reported that the renovation of the sanctuary was completed at a cost of \$19,444.27."

Lest a reader infer that building and improvements were the primary activities of the church, he or she need only to refer to the conference minutes of July 10, 1966, and Ben Mann's motion that the church "enter into 'the 5 year Spiritual Growth Plan.'" The church council set the goals under five general areas, but its clarification under the heading of "Increasing Our Church's Outreach" lends credence to the perception of Roberts Chapel's understanding of its relationship with its community:

Our church membership depends upon the population of the community. There are no prospects for significant growth in membership at present. We will continue to seek to bring into our membership all in our community not affiliated with another church in the area of the larger community. We shall seek to lead all members into a deeper and more meaningful relationship and involvement in the life and ministry of the church.

In the meantime, grief had entered the life of the church with the death of the pastor's wife, Arver Phillips, who "died at her home, our church parsonage, on Monday, October 3, 1960. Her body was taken to her Georgia home for burial" (Min., 226). Mr. Phillips stayed with the church for seven years after his wife's death but resigned as of May 31, 1967, to go into the schools in the very difficult times of desegregation. On the occasion of his last sermon at Roberts Chapel, the church gave him a typewriter and presented him a certificate of appreciation—whose wording included "He that would be greatest among you must be the servant of all."

On July 28, 1998, Mr. Phillips indicated that, of all the facets of ministry, personal relationships brought him the most joy. He said, "My personal ministry was my personal sermon."

Mr. Phillips and long-time member of the church, Ruth Stephenson, a widow, married in 1963 and, except for a brief period away, have retained membership in Roberts Chapel.

### R. ERNEST POSTON 1967–1973

Following the worship service of August 6, 1967, Roberts Chapel extended to the Rev. Ernest Poston an invitation to become its second full-time pastor in the long line of sixteen ministers who had preceded him. His ministry began September 1, 1967, and he and Mrs. Poston, David, Julia, and Susan Poston joined by transfer of letters.

During Mr. Poston's ministry, the church continued on a similar path of previous years; i.e., attention to spiritual dimensions, organizations, and physical facilities.

One evidence of the church's spiritual concern was its vote in 1968 to participate in the "Crusade of the Americas"—a "cooperative . . . evangelistic thrust in which 20 million Baptists in South, Central and North America are uniting their efforts to deepen the spiritual life of Christians, [and to] point the lost to Christ."

Spiritual concerns at home were made manifest, in part, in the organizations of the church. For example, the Sunday school created two new departments—the Young People Away Department for youth and a Cradle Roll Department for infants. The Church Training program presented its goals to the congregation in the conference of October 10, 1973:

1. To promote special studies in Christian Education as it relates to life today.
2. To involve members in developing a deeper appreciation and understanding of Christian living and its application to life today.
3. To understand more fully the significance of family life and its positive expression in Christian living.
4. To provide recreational opportunities for youth and adults.

And to bring an added spiritual dimension to the worship service, where the spiritual aspect is often most likely to be found, Joan Horne, chair of the music committee, announced in October 1973 that “plans are being developed for a special Christmas cantata that will be given the Sunday before Christmas” (Min., 10-10-73).

Very little building, if any, occurred during this period; however, at the September 10, 1972, conference, “a motion was approved to purchase covers for the church pews at a cost of approximately \$500.00, the installation to be delayed until funds are in hand,” and on June 3, 1973—the Sunday on which Mr. Poston tendered his resignation—the church approved three air conditioning units for the parsonage and new paint inside and out.

Two statements from conference minutes of the seventies gave an added sense of time and place to the period: “Brotherhood President Bud Warren advised that there would be no meeting in October due to the peanut harvesting season” (Min., 10-6-71); and Stanley H. Barnes, Chairman of the Christian Action League, “advised that transportation would be available for anyone desiring to vote” (Min., 10-10-73). It was not a presidential election year, but a local or statewide race can also entice voters to the polls. And while Mr. Barnes’ announcement could have been a blanket invitation for all time to come, its impact on American voters could have been greater than usual in 1973, the Watergate scandal’s having mesmerized the nation for weeks on end.

## ROBERTS CHAPEL BAPTIST CHURCH

---

EDWIN C. DACUS

1974–1980

On July 22, 1973, the pulpit supply committee recommended that Roberts Chapel call as interim pastor the Rev. Edwin Dacus, who had recently served in the same capacity in Rich Square, North Carolina, and Newsome, Virginia, while he coordinated the alcoholism program at Roanoke-Chowan Mental Health Service in nearby Ahoskie.

The search for a full-time minister was apparently quite difficult for the pulpit committee, as evidenced by the following letter dated October 28, 1973:

In view of the fact this Pulpit Committee, appointed by the members of Roberts Chapel Church to seek out and recommend a pastor, has prayerfully sought to carry out your mandate, but we have not found the man we feel led by the Holy Spirit to fill this position.

We believe it to be in the best interest of this church and all concerned, for this Committee to resign thereby giving you the opportunity to appoint another Committee for this task. We assure you of our continued prayers that our church may follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit in finding and accepting a spiritual leader. . . .

S/ James W. Jenkins; Stanley H. Barnes; Iris F. Liverman; May L. Outland; and Jane B. Taylor.

On December 2, a new committee—John H. Woodard, Chairman; G.E. Fisher; Joan Horne; Martha Stephenson; and Larry Mann—was appointed, and, on February 3, 1974, the committee recommended “extending a call to Edwin C. Dacus to become regular pastor,” and a week later, at a previously announced conference, “Motion to accept report of Pulpit Committee duly seconded and carried by a vote of 55 to 23” (Min., 2–10–74).

In some of the earlier conferences moderated by the new pastor, the church turned benevolent, as it often did, pledging toward a mobile

unit “from which to minister to migrant workers” (Min., 7-3-74) and later that month approving an additional contribution toward a migrant workers’ chapel in Rich Square (Min., 7-21-74). In 1976, the Brotherhood sponsored “a donation supper (featuring rock muddle prepared by Howard Woodard) as a gesture of love and concern for Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Baker who recently lost their son, Tim Baker.” Held at the community building in Severn on May 5, 1976, the occasion also drew people from nearby communities. “On May 19, 1976, a check was mailed to Mr. and Mrs. Baker for \$1046, designated as a Tim Baker Memorial Fund” (Undated report from the Brotherhood).

One might infer that the “use of church owned land for construction of tennis courts”—sponsored by the Brotherhood (Min., 7-3-74)—would not be so weighty a matter; however, a place of wholesome recreation for the Roberts Chapel family would seem to indicate balance in the church’s ministry. For example, not far from that time, the church entered the Bold Mission Program, of which “Strengthening the Family” was one of its phases (Min., 9-9-78).

In the meantime, the pastor had strengthened the church family’s organization by seeking and finding approval of a church council, which would comprise all department heads (Min., 7-6-77).

The lively music program of this period was another indication of balance. In 1974, Roberts Chapel sponsored “a church music group for a special workshop at Camp Caraway near Asheboro, N.C.—Joan Horne Phyllis Mann, Sandra Woodard, and John H. Woodard” (Min., 9-1-74). In 1975, the congregation voted to buy choir robes; in 1976, at the recommendation of the music and worship committee, it bought a tape recorder to provide a tape ministry; and, in the same year, the church installed a new Allen organ, which first became a part of the worship service in December.

## ROBERTS CHAPEL BAPTIST CHURCH

---

Minutes of a called conference on September 25, 1977, read,

At 3:00 p.m. an Organ Recital and Dedication Service was held in the church sanctuary. Guest organist was Dave Kirk, representative of the Allen Organ Company. A special Memoriam was represented by Joan Horne outlining the events leading up to the purchase of the organ and giving special recognition for memorial gifts. The organ was dedicated to the following deceased members:

John and Edna Parker	Gilbert T. Stephenson
W. Harry Stephenson	Grady Belle Bryant
Catherine Woodard	Beulah Jones
W.C. Stephenson	Viola S. Layton
W.M. Stephenson	J.C. and Lollie Edwards

Printed on the back of the program were these words: "The digital organ computer concept was based on its ability to convert sound wave shapes into memory and recalled by a touch of the organ keys. It is incredibly authentic and infinitely varied. May it witness to the glory of God for many years to come."

That last sentence might well have applied to other tangible reminders that on "this high and prominent spot" sat a church. For example, "an appropriate steeple" could also "witness to the glory of God." The conference minutes of December 9, 1979, recorded that the G.E. Fisher family gave such a steeple—including lights—to replace the original dome.

And the conference records of August 24, 1980, show that Roberts Chapel "accepted request of pastor Edwin C. Dacus that his resignation be accepted effective September 1, 1980." In October, the church called Garland Hendricks "as interim pastor for November and December" (Min., 10-5-80).

BROKEN OLIVER

1981-1982

In 1977, Kenneth Boyd Oliver had legally changed his name to "Broken Oliver" as a result "of a new commitment to the Lord" (Report, pulpit committee, 3-1-81), and, in 1978, he was ordained into the ministry. The Rev. Broken Oliver accepted the pastorate of Roberts Chapel Church, to begin his ministry on March 8, 1981. Mr. Oliver was a seminary student, although he had previously earned a master's degree in education. He came to the pastorate during the time of the "Morning in America" sensibility of the Ronald Reagan presidency.

Whether it was "Morning in Northampton County," only local citizens would recall; however, outward signs of progress seemed to indicate that Roberts Chapel continued to abound with a morning's energy. For example, in this period, the budget increased from \$16,986.00 in 1980 to \$21,741.00 in 1982; young people went to Caswell; and several new members came into the church.

A church would almost require morning's energy to rewrite its constitution and by-laws, a project recommended January 11, 1981, for Annie Laurie Burgess, John H. Woodard, Jr., David Collins, and Ben Mann. The committee reported its progress April 12; the congregation considered, amended, and tabled the document for study June 7, finally reconsidering and approving it June 28, 1981.

In February 1982, the membership "approved and accepted offer of playground equipment from Severn-Pendleton Ruritan Club" and asked the buildings and grounds committee to assist with the installation on an appropriate site (Min., 2-7-82).

As for matters of the primary business of the church, Roberts Chapel joined the special "Here's Hope" Crusade (simultaneous revivals across the state) from March 14-18, 1982.

In a called conference on July 4, 1982, "Pastor Broken Oliver submitted his resignation effective July 20. . . ." After two months, the church approved Rev. Felix Arnold of Enfield as interim pastor.

DAVID WOOD  
1983–1984

As was customary, "a listing of understandings reached between Mr. Wood and the Pulpit Search Committee were submitted . . . and understood to be a Pastor–Church Covenant which if he was to be called, both parties would agree to" (Min., 5–15–83). David Wood was called by unanimous vote.

Again, the Severn-Pendleton Ruritan Club was generous—this time with a gift of \$700.00 for a movie projector. Any remaining funds from purchasing the projector would be used to buy a screen (Min., 4–8–84). The Rev. Randolph Phillips, who reported the gift, used the opportunity to note "that the library had been changed to a Media Library Concept" (Min., 1–8–84).

The gift-giving season of Christmas having just passed, the deacons remembered a December Christmon service and recommended that the church reimburse the Young Baptist Women for the tree used in the program and "budget an amount from here on to cover future Christmas decorations" (Min., 1–8–84).

Giving gifts was not uncommon, as previous entries indicate. In April, when spring storms are sometimes most devastating, the congregation sent \$250.00 to the Lewiston Volunteer Fire Department for distribution to victims of a recent tornado.

And to satisfy the pardonable pride in the appearance of its buildings, the church gave itself some gifts, too: shrubbery for the parsonage and plexiglass storm windows to cover the stained glass in the sanctuary in 1983; and new draperies "for the social hall, adjoining classrooms and kitchen" in 1984 (Min. 10–21–84).

It also gave itself the long-time habit of good messenger representation to both State and Southern Baptist conventions and to the West Chowan Association.

In July 1984, the church bought a share of stock in the Severn Swim Club, which would provide use of the pool to occupants of the parsonage, with the users paying the annual club dues.

After a short stay, the then-current occupants of the parsonage left, moving their letters to Roanoke Baptist Church in Roanoke Rapids. Mr. Wood's resignation became effective on November 11, 1984.

WINDELL PATTERSON  
1985–1992

It had been only three years since the Rev. Felix Arnold had served Roberts Chapel as interim pastor; however, the church sought his return to that ministry following Mr. Woods' resignation. His stay was short—from January through March 1985—when the congregation approved the pastor search committee's recommendation to call the Rev. Windell Patterson as minister (Min., 3–24–85).

Especially from 1985 through the remainder of the decade, gifts kept coming in—and some going out, of course. For example, the church accepted unanimously "the gift from John and Faye Glover of a chime system to be installed in the choir and given in memory of William D. (Bill) Edwards" (Min., 6–9–85). In July, "It was noted that a new typewriter had been given to the church in memory of Catherine Taylor. Those responsible for the gift were Connie Taylor, Linwood and Janie Taylor, and Joe and Joan Horne" (Min., 7–14–85). In April 1987, it was announced "that Mattie Johnson had given \$1,000.00 to be used to start a Cemetery Endowment Fund" (Min., 4–12–87). By October 1990, the endowment had grown to \$1,460.00, and the deacon body recommended the establishment of that trust fund for which the endowment was given . . . "with trustees to be

selected” (Min., 10–28–90). In a called conference on February 13, 1991, E.J. Burgess, Linwood Taylor, and John H. Woodard were duly elected as trustees.

As early as 1975, the church appointed a committee to suggest gift opportunities for those wanting to honor the memories of loved ones. And as late as 1989, “A Dedication Service of name plates on stained glass windows and plaques on the pews was held” (Min., 11–26–89).

The church also continued giving: In 1987, it contributed \$200.00 to the Associational Building Fund, and it observed a special day to make an offering for Hospice. In 1989 it gave “a parcel of land to the Black Masonic Lodge, 25 feet wide x approximately 180 feet deep, adjoining to their property, providing the recipients bear all costs in the transfer of the land” (Min., 12–31–89).

Records are not clear as to the exact date of Mr. Patterson’s resignation; however, a pulpit search committee was appointed April 12, 1992.

### ANTHONY POSTON 1992–1994

Roberts Chapel Church met for a called conference on Sunday, August 2, 1992: “The recommendation was given by the Pulpit Search Committee that the church extend an invitation to Rev. Anthony Poston to become its pastor.”

In the brief period of Mr. Poston’s ministry, the church welcomed twelve new members—four by letter and eight by baptism. In 1998, the highest compliments would go to him and his wife, Kathi, for their focus on the youth and for Mrs. Poston’s musical talents.

The congregation elected a pulpit search committee on November 13, 1994, to seek a successor to Mr. Poston, and it welcomed the news of an interim pastor—the Rev. Lonnie Armstrong— on Sunday, February 19, 1995.

PHILIP THOMPSON

1995—

A peruser of historical documents finds the first mention of a prospective new pastor in the quarterly conference minutes for Sunday, July 9, 1995: "Betty Moore [pulpit search committee chair] encouraged everyone to be present next Saturday for the picnic, next Sunday for the trial sermon, and the following Sunday for a vote. . . ." And, on Sunday, July 30, the committee presented the name and recommended the calling of Philip Thompson "as our full time pastor. The motion was seconded and after positive comments, the standing vote was unanimous." Dr. Thompson and his wife, Marcia—a native of nearby Murfreesboro—joined Roberts Chapel on August 20, 1995, "through transfer of church letter from Northside Drive Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia."

In the meantime, the membership had been busy with several projects for refurbishing the church building and the parsonage. For example, Hinton Britton had proposed "to paint the outside of the church at a cost of approximately \$5,000," and the vote to accept his offer was unanimous (Min., 6–11–95). E.J. Burgess "reported that the Burgess family had offered to provide the funds to replace the front walk" (Min., 8–27–95). Other house-of-worship improvements would include replacing the front porch and the front tier caps; crown molding and new paint in the sanctuary. But the work on the parsonage would be completed first: vinyl to replace outside decayed wood trim; a new side porch and front steps; and paint where needed—including the fence, which the local 4-H Club had volunteered to paint.

The improvements would come at a good time. At the July quarterly conference, "Rev. Thompson noted that our church's 150th Anniversary was coming up in October 1998" (Min., 7–14–96). At the same meeting, another improvement was announced: "Miss Betty Moore reported that the new *Baptist Hymnals* had been chosen to replace the old ones."

Between that July meeting and the October quarterly conference, an infamous hurricane had hit North Carolina with a vengeance on September 7, and “It was reported that a new roof had been installed on the back part (Social Hall) of the church to repair damage from Hurricane Fran. Insurance covered the cost” (Min., 10–13–96).

Several years of unrest in the Southern Baptist Convention had caused division in the denomination. In their autonomy, some local churches had remained staunch supporters of the convention, contributing to its operation and using its literature; others, while not withdrawing from the convention, had aligned themselves—both financially and by use of publications— with a more moderate group (not a convention) known as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina provided a plan by which churches would decide the distribution of their own cooperative dollars: In all plans, the Baptist State Convention would receive 68% of contributions. In addition, Plan A would contribute 32% to the Southern Baptist Convention. Plan B would grant 10% to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program; 10.9% to theological education in North Carolina Baptist colleges and universities; and 11.1% to special foreign, home, and other missions. Plan C would follow Plan B, except for replacing SBC Cooperative Program contributions with designated funds to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

On April 13, 1997, at Roberts Chapel, one member voted for Plan A; and the other forty-two present split their decisions evenly, giving Plans B and C twenty-one votes each. The church continues to practice that method of distribution.

The special deacon-appointed cemetery improvement committee, comprising Joan Horne, Foy Fisher, John Howard Woodard, and Betty Moore, had formulated and carried out its own plans. In addition to general refurbishing, it paved driveways and erected small brick pillars on either side of the center drive. A bronze plaque affixed to the right pillar offers a brief history of the church:

Site of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church  
built in 1871 and destroyed by fire in December 1924.

Its history dates from the Colonial Period,  
and its origin may be traced to St. Paul's, Anglican.

As Roberts Chapel

it served both Methodists and Baptists  
until 1848 when it was constituted as a Baptist Church.

Rebuilt in 1927, the current church stands 1/2 mile north.

In the conference for January 11, 1998, "E.J. Burgess expressed appreciation for the work of the Cemetery [Improvement] Committee in the paving of the driveways and suggested a 'John Glover Appreciation Day.'" (Mr. Glover laid the road beds for the cemetery.)

Dr. Thompson, the son of a Baptist minister, is a graduate of Mars Hill College (Baptist), of Union Theological Seminary (Presbyterian), and of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Emory University (Methodist). He is particularly glad to have studied at Union. "I really think it was the time I spent studying with the Presbyterians that I learned exactly how to be a Baptist," he says.

In a July 28, 1998 conversation with the author, Dr. Thompson speaks of his pastorate at Roberts Chapel. "A certain highlight for me," he says, "was young Connie Taylor's baptism. She's the only person I've baptized here." Another high point of his ministry has been working with the youth. "We have a strong youth group, although, from attrition, we're getting smaller and smaller. We have several children who are six and under and then fourteen and older but nothing in between, which makes it problematic when visitors come with children."

He is also proud of a new room that was redone for a children's Sunday school class. "It's important that a church put its best energies into the nurture of its children."

And he cites the 1996 church vote that elected Betty Moore the first woman deacon at Roberts Chapel. Almost as much as with the election itself, he is pleased with the little to-do that was made of a woman's taking her place on the Diaconate. "In fact," he says, "We had three women in the top seven." A vote was taken in the eighties, say people who remember, to include the possibility of women deacons. Dr. Moore had joined the church in 1992.

The pastor "would like to see our church do a lot more to alleviate human need—to understand the mission role of the church." He suggested service throughout the community—on a volunteer basis—as the annual period of revival in 1998. On August 29, 1998, volunteers from Roberts Chapel completed service projects for elderly or disabled persons in Conway and Seaboard.

**I**n Pendleton, it is difficult to tell where the community ends and the church begins; one is so much a part of the other. Some of the past and present exemplary citizens—and one frequent visitor—have eagerly voiced their opinions, recalled their memories, and expressed their hopes.

**Randolph Phillips:** "Like all rural churches, Roberts Chapel is getting smaller. When I drive through the community, I see open fields where houses used to be. 'One horse farms' are no more."

**Ruth Stephenson Phillips:** "Farms have to be larger for the farmer to be able to afford the machinery he has to have."

**Mr. Phillips:** "Roberts Chapel is somewhat the center of community life. It was when I came in 1953. Most people in Pendleton are Baptists."

**Mrs. Phillips:** "They don't know anything else. People didn't have cars then, but everything was planned around the meetings in the church, and we all walked that far and never thought anything about it."

**Joan Baker:** "The church itself has a special meaning. It gave me the background that I go on today. When my son died, the church raised money to help with his medical bills." Dr. Thompson had alluded to Mrs. Baker's sense of mission. She said, "I guess out of need yourself you see the needs of others."

**Audrey Barnes Harper:** "The church was the community congregating." Mrs. Harper refuses to compare the church today to the church of her childhood: "I don't think it would be fair to make a comparison," she said—"the way the whole world has changed—and everybody in it."

**Connie Taylor:** "Our church that burned was 'home built.' The men went in on the left side and the women on the right. I remember the common goblet we used for communion, and we used only a particular kind of grape for the wine." He alludes to an unrecorded problem: "The snakes got so bad in the mill pond we couldn't baptize. I was baptized over at Conway in their old church building." And he also speaks of an unrecorded event: "When radios got so popular, Mr. Bernard Johnson sold them, and one Sunday night he brought one to church for people to hear. It was the first time I ever heard one." He rather proudly states that "in 1849 my great grandfather Jethro Taylor joined the church and there's been somebody in my family a member of the church ever since."

**Hazel Barnes:** “My heart was always at that church. It was the center of the community’s life.” When Dr. Thompson inquired of her favorite childhood activities, she answered, “Basketball”! Then she hastily added, “Sunday School and B.Y.P.U.”

**George Edwards:** “They had a big board up in front of the church with all the classes listed—the ones enrolled, the ones present, on time, prepared lessons. . . . It was there for everybody to look at. It was sort of an incentive.” He also remembers some baptisms at Kirby’s Creek. And he explains how rigidly church conferences [for men only] were conducted on Saturdays; to the question of “Didn’t the farmers have to work in the fields on Saturdays?” he answers quickly, “No, ma’am—not on church conference day”! Frances and George Edwards have recently returned to Pendleton and the church after several years away.

**Martha Lou Stephenson:** “From my childhood, I’ve had an unusual and unique love for this church—an almost shocking pride in it, but I think pride is forgiven somewhat because the people feel that the church is a big part of them, and they’re a big part of the church. This is the only church I’ve ever been in where the people care for it almost on a par with their homes. It’s the center. It’s like a family. . . . When I was a child, there were strong leaders, and we looked to them as we did the preacher—as though they were employed by the church. I sense a real hunger for new voices and new leadership, and I think Philip Thompson is helping us realize how important that is.”

**Elsie Minter:** “The people take an attitude which is not entirely Baptist, and then they have another attitude which is completely and absolutely Baptist from its very background. . . . I would say the middle-aged and the old people dominate the church; for that reason, when they do something like elect a woman deacon, I’m always dumbfounded, be-

cause that's not typical of that age group. They disagree like Baptists, and yet there's a certain serenity in the church that I like very, very much, particularly in the worship service on Sunday morning." Dr. Minter is among the newest members of the church.

**Edith Stephenson Simpson**, Raleigh: "I remember going to Sunbeams and G.A.'s in people's homes and to Training Union on Sunday nights, but mostly I remember the revivals and the music. The music was always good. Aunt Lizzie and Aunt Mattie were the organists, and I played the piano on Sunday nights."

**Betty Moore**: "The sense of mission in this church is to nourish the members of the community, and that kind of warmth has helped me feel at home in Pendleton. My experience on the Board of Deacons has been very good. The fact that the church hasn't had women deacons, I think, is not so much ideological as it is habit. And we have a great Sunday school class of faithful attenders. It's very much a community church, but this community is getting old. I'm very much concerned about the future."

**Suzanne Britt**, Raleigh (frequent visitor): "I feel that I know this church—the people in it—better than my church in Raleigh. It is more than a church: it is the civic center, a meeting place, a place for entertainment—and I don't mean to disparage the obvious spiritual nature of it. I've never seen a church that so defines what the community is like. I find it—particularly with Philip Thompson—a very gratifying experience to go there. During harvest time, everything proceeds as usual. I think that's stunning. It recalls the verse, 'Where two or three are gathered. . . .' All through the week, you're thinking churchward."

**Joe Alex Horne:** "I remember meeting at the Edwardses on Sunday afternoon to play ball. It was our social life. The teachers I remember were Annie Hart Boone and Mrs. Walter Woodard; the preacher would have to be, probably, Mr. Pegram. . . and I remember Lonnie Sasser because of his long prayers. I remember Miss Viola Stephenson, pianist and organist; Virginia Parker, who followed her; and, of course, Sandra Woodard is organist now."

**Joan Horne:** "I directed the choir, I guess, for thirty years. We did some things—had people come from the state department to hold workshops—and had a lot of good music. In fact, we went to WRAL in Raleigh one time—the late sixties, I think—and sang on television, recording [*Church of our Fathers*] on Saturday so we could come back home and watch ourselves on Sunday."

**Mr. Horne:** "We sang 'Jacob's Ladder.'"

**Philip Thompson:** "One thing I've tried to impress upon the church is to take this anniversary as a time to think about the next years. Small, rural churches live in a precarious condition, and our church is beset by many of the dynamics that have led to the demise of other churches, so I hope we will use this time to reflect and to find a sense of vision for the future."

It is a high and prominent thought for a high and prominent place.

## Acknowledgments

To members of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church—and more specifically to the history committee, co-chaired by Betty Moore and Joan Horne—I express my deep appreciation for giving me the opportunity to write this history. I am grateful as well to Philip Thompson, whose interest and advice have contributed greatly to the finished product; to Martha Lou Stephenson, who not only arranged conferences but also provided “room and board” for days on end; to Foy and Billy Fisher, who offered their dining room table for searching the valuable old church minutes, which remain securely in their care; to Kitty Mann, who typed sixteen years’ worth of records to make research easy; to Suzanne Britt, who has been an encourager and a grammarian *extraordinaire*; to George Edwards, who graciously shared his book on Anglican parishes in Northampton County; to John Howard and Sandra Woodard, who hand-delivered needed materials; to Edwin T. Barnes of Raleigh, who volunteered the use of his priceless microfilmed church records, saving me countless trips to the Baptist collection at Wake Forest University; to Billy Crisp, who provided the church with previously taped interviews; and to other members quoted herein, who took the time to speak into his microphone and mine.

—Carolyn C. Robinson

## Sources Consulted

Beard, Charles A. and Mary R.. *The Beards' Basic History of the United States*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1944.

Campbell, Carlyle. "The Idea of Community." Address to the Meredith College student body, date unknown, Campbell papers.

Interviews: The historian with Joan Baker, Suzanne Britt, George and Frances Edwards, Audrey Barnes Harper, Joan and Joe Alex Horne, Elsie Minter, Betty Moore, Randolph and Ruth Phillips, Philip E. Thompson, Edith Stephenson Simpson, and Martha Lou Stephenson; the pastor with Hazel Barnes, Hinton Britton, and Connie Taylor.

*New York Times 1998 Almanac*, John W. Wright, ed. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1997.

Lewis, Henry Wilkins. *Northampton Parishes*. Jackson, N.C.: 1951.

Minutes, Roberts Chapel Baptist Church, 1848–1998.

Minutes, the Roberts Chapel Diaconate, 1954–1964.

Stephenson, Emma Gay and W. Harry. *A Century of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church, 1848–1948*, as read on October 31, 1948, by Mrs. Mildred Davis Bell, Miss Emma Gay Stephenson.

Stephenson, W. Harry. *A Brief Historical Sketch of Roberts Chapel Baptist Church in Pendleton, N.C.*, "written by request of Church Conference May 1, 1937, . . . for the dedication of the new church building on August 5, 1937.

Turner, J. Clyde. *The New Testament Doctrine of the Church*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1951.

Creech Col. 280.4 R658h  
Robinson.  
A High and prominent place

## The Sesquicentennial

### SESIQUICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

Joan Horne, Betty Moore (Co-chairs), Doris Lewter, C.B. Taylor, John H. Woodard, Philip E. Thompson (Pastor)

### SUBCOMMITTEES

**Fundraising Projects:** Pat Barnes, Joan Baker, Youth of the Church

**Historical Exhibits:** Martha Lou Stephenson, John H. Woodard, Foy Fisher

**Historical Skit:** Doris Lewter, writer; Joan Horn, producer

**Church History:** Carolyn C. Robinson

**Invitations:** Louise Mann, Kitty Mann, Jane Taylor

**Publicity and Invitations to Former Pastors:** Philip E. Thompson

**Food:** Nancy Beasley, Judy Barnes, Anne Edwards

**Food Tent, Tables, Chairs, etc.:** John H. Woodard

**Nursery:** Church Nursery Committee

**Audiovisual and Photographic Project:** Billy Crisp and Philip E. Thompson

**Book and Souvenir Sales:** Doris Lewter

**Church Decorations and Flowers:** Kitty Mann, Foy Fisher, Pat Barnes

**Music:** Church Music Committee: Joan Horne, Betty Moore, Bill Parker, Sandra Woodard, with Philip E. Thompson

**Registration:** Jane Taylor (Chair)

**Welcome:** Foy Fisher (Chair)

